

**CELEBRITY PERSONAL BRAND STRATEGIES ON ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MALAYSIAN CELEBRITIES**

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A thesis in full fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(Business Administration)

Centre for Graduate Studies
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2016

DECLARATION

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work, except for quotations and summaries, which have been duly acknowledged.

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August 2016

ABSTRACT

Celebrity personal branding has evolved with the explosion of social media. Although celebrity personal branding and online social media have been researched, the majority of research has studied these two areas independently. There has been a lack of research in examining celebrity personal branding and online social media collectively specifically in the Malaysian entertainment industry hence leaving a gap in the research area. The research aims to fill the gap and contribute in terms of theoretical knowledge. The main objectives of the research are to analyse the strategies applied by Malaysian entertainment celebrities in the usage of social media for personal branding. In addition, the research investigated why social media was chosen by Malaysian entertainment celebrities as a media of choice. The unique challenges faced by the Malaysian entertainment celebrities and opportunities in the usage of social media were also identified. Finally, a conceptual framework for the strategic utilisation of celebrity personal brand strategies online to build celebrity personal branding was suggested. A qualitative research approach was selected for the purpose of the research. Ten Malaysian entertainment celebrities were selected for the purpose of the study. After an extensive literature review on branding, personal branding, celebrity personal branding and online social media, data was collected via personal interviewing and subsequently analysed. The findings of the research indicated that social media is a lifetime resume for celebrity personal branding. Additionally, the traditional media and online media compliment each other in achieving celebrity brand popularity. Malaysian entertainment celebrities choose to individually manage the social media themselves and are personally involved in the process. A more personal related posting done by storytelling seems to be adopted as compared to a work related posts by Malaysian entertainment celebrities. An additional factor considered in social media is the timing of the postings as interactions is essential in the social media. Social media however has provided new challenges for the Malaysian entertainment celebrities such as the threat of hackers, impersonation, unwanted affiliations and the challenge of overcoming negative feedbacks. Social media has provided an additional avenue in generating revenue for Malaysian entertainment celebrities such as providing promotional opportunities through sponsoring or endorsing a particular product or brand.

Keywords:

Celebrity Personal Branding, Social Media, Celebrity Personal Brand Strategies, Qualitative, Exploratory

STRATEGI-STRATEGI PENJENAMAAN PERIBADI SELEBRITI TERHADAP MEDIA SOSIAL ATAS TALIAN: SATU KAJIAN EKSPLORATORI BAGI SELEBRITI-SELEBRITI MALAYSIA.

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AUGUST 2016

ABSTRAK

Penjenamaan peribadi selebriti telah berkembang dengan ledakan media sosial. Walaupun penjenamaan peribadi selebriti dan media sosial dalam talian telah pun dikaji selidik, majoriti penyelidikan telah mengkaji dua lapangan ini secara berasingan. Terdapat kekurangan penyelidikan dalam penelitian penjenamaan peribadi selebriti dan media sosial dalam talian secara kolektif, terutamanya dalam industri hiburan Malaysia, justeru meninggalkan jurang dalam bidang penyelidikan tersebut. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk memenuhi jurang tersebut dan menyumbang dari sudut pengetahuan teori. Objektif-objektif utama penyelidikan ini adalah untuk menganalisa strategi-strategi yang digunapakai oleh selebriti-selebriti hiburan Malaysia dalam penggunaan media sosial untuk penjenamaan peribadi. Penyelidikan ini juga menyiasat kenapa media sosial dipilih oleh selebriti-selebriti hiburan Malaysia sebagai media pilihan. Cabaran-cabaran unik yang dihadapi oleh selebriti-selebriti hiburan Malaysia serta peluang-peluang dalam penggunaan media sosial juga dikenal pasti. Akhir sekali, satu rangka kerja konsep untuk penggunaan strategik penjenamaan selebriti dalam talian untuk membina penjenamaan peribadi selebriti dicadangkan. Pendekatan penyelidikan kualitatif dipilih untuk tujuan penyelidikan ini. Seramai sepuluh selebriti hiburan telah dipilih bagi tujuan kajian ini. Setelah sorotan kajian yang menyeluruh tentang penjenamaan, penjenamaan peribadi, penjenamaan peribadi selebriti dan media sosial dalam talian, data telah dikumpul melalui temubual peribadi dan seterusnya dianalisa. Dapatan penyelidikan menunjukkan media sosial adalah resume seumur hidup untuk penjenamaan peribadi selebriti. Sebagai tambahan, media tradisional dan media dalam talian mengena sesama sendiri dalam pencapaian populariti jenama selebriti. Selebriti-selebriti hiburan Malaysia memilih untuk menguruskan media sosial sendiri dan terlibat secara peribadi dalam proses pengendalian tersebut. Satu 'posting' yang lebih berbentuk peribadi melalui proses penceritaan adalah lebih cenderung digunakan berbanding yang lebih berunsurkan kerja oleh selebriti-selebriti hiburan Malaysia. Faktor tambahan yang diambilkira dalam media sosial adalah kesesuaian masa sesuatu 'posting' itu kerana interaksi adalah penting dalam media sosial. Namun media sosial telah memberikan cabaran-cabaran baru kepada selebriti-selebriti hiburan di Malaysia seperti ancaman penggoda, penyamaran identiti, afiliasi yang tak diingini dan maklumbalas-maklumbalas negatif. Media sosial telah membuka ruang tambahan dalam menjana hasil pendapatan kepada selebriti-selebriti hiburan Malaysia seperti menyediakan peluang promosi melalui penganjuran atau pengesahan sesuatu keluaran atau jenama.

Kata Kunci:

Penjenamaan Peribadi Selebriti, Media Sosial, Strategi-strategi Penjenamaan Peribadi Selebriti, Kualitatif, Eksploratori

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This had been a priceless journey for me. Ever since I was young, I was told that female do not need high education and after I entered into the entertainment world, people kept telling me that it was hard to achieve my goals. Hence, I decided to pursue my PhD to train myself, analyse problems deeply and invent methods to create my own destiny rather than just depend on luck also I just wanted to prove that, “What a son can do, a daughter can do it better with heart”.

I started my PhD studies in 2010, and it took me six years to complete it. I almost wanted to give up half way due to my hectic schedule in my entertainment line but thank you so much to my mom and dad for being so supportive. Also, thank you to my supervisor, Dr Wardah, Open University Malaysia, my family, my company, Beyond Artistes Sdn Bhd, team, business partners, friends, media and my fans. They gave me so much strength and support throughout the whole journey. They are the main motivation and drive in life.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all people out there to remind them to keep pursuing their dreams and not to give up their education regardless of anything because education is the key to solve all problems and to create your own destiny. Also, to all the parents out there, I just wanted to say, “Believe in your children’s wildest dream even though nobody believe in them” and to all the people out there, “If I can do it, anyone of you can do it better than me”. Lastly, do not ever look down on anyone, also keep sharing and helping others, remember to “Embrace all negativity as weights of trainings in life and excel with positivity!”

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSO	Branding Strategy Online
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CBSO	Corporate Brand Strategy Online
PBSO	Political Brand Strategy Online
ROI	Return on Investment
RQ	Research Question
SBSO	Social Brand Strategy Online

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Personal branding is the most effective strategy for the human workforce in all fields in differentiating themselves from other competitors (Arruda & Dixon, 2007; McNally & Speak, 2002; Montoya, Vandehey & Viti, 2002). However, personal branding had been largely neglected in the field of academics (Klein, 2002) leaving gaps in various emerging branding theories (Hughes, 2007; Zarkaria, 2010). Today personal branding is not just limited towards the offline world but had evolved onto online social media.

Traditionally, consumers use online social media for a simple content. In this era, users are utilising online social media to create, modify, share, and discuss content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). As each country developed from an industrial country towards technology country, visibility is the key of success as visibility represents advertising dollars especially in the online world. This represents the online social media that are influencing the offline operation world, will justify firm's reputation, sales, and even survival. The influence of online social media towards the offline world will increase as the population of people entering into the online world increases. Due to the increasing usage of social media, various sectors and celebrities

have switched their focus to integrate their social media platforms to lead the new generation, gain traffic and fans, and transform it to value (DeMers, 2013). In the future, where visibility generates monetary value, investment in the social media will become a necessity and not just a luxury (Asacker, 2004).

Celebrity personal branding had also grown with the domination of online social media and therefore the ability to master the art of branding themselves on online social media had become the most important skills for the celebrities (Hockly, Dudeney, & Pegrum, 2014). More brands and firms are switching their branding strategies from traditional offline media onto online social media platforms (Parkin, 2013). According to the founder of Razor Social, which is the best resource online to seek information on social media tools, the activities of earning profit via online social media will become a norm (Jindal, 2013). Users will start to utilise more on passion-based content via online social platforms (Hong, 2014). Whereas, Charles (2013) argued that online social media would not always be the platform for sales due to the users' mentality in this current time frame which against the traditional "hard-selling" marketing method hence different strategies are needed on online social media.

As online social media evolves in an unprecedented speed, just mere usage is insufficient. According to the Vice President for Digital Marketing & Social Media at Los Angeles TAG Strategic, a digital entertainment consultation firm, the entire online social media phenomena must first be studied and analysed in order to derive strategic strategies to achieve continuous success (Brennan, 2014; Hutchinson, 2014). Otherwise, it is just a normal tool if it is not properly used and to its full potential (Stuart, 2009).

The most powerful group of individuals with the most fans on social media are celebrities (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010; Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Elite Email, a world leader in digital marketing tools for small to medium-sized businesses, has ranked celebrities with the most social media power in 2013 (Elite Email, 2013). International celebrities like Kim Kardashian are paid 5 figures in USD for every single tweet promoting a product or brand due to their visibility online (Tomić, 2013). Hence celebrities' influential power on social media is undeniable (Effron, 2013; Miller, 2014; Shaughnessy, 2013). Celebrities with millions of followers on online social media also had the tremendous influence towards the mass (Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, Kamp Dush, & Sullivan, 2012). Media or followers always keep track of celebrity's posting, sharing their posting on their social media accounts and even making it into news (Istanboulian, 2012). This visibility being built by celebrities on online social media had mapped the name of each country in the eyes of the world (Fraser & Brown, 2002).

On the other hand, as online social media breaks down the traditional methods of celebrity personal branding, the means of celebrity personal brands had covered a wider range of public figures ranging from not just singers, actresses, models and hosts but also businessmen or even politicians (Hunter, Burgers, & Davidsson, 2009).

With the increase in connectivity, the volume of contents and the number of channels through which it is posted, social media is a key aspect of the art organisations' outreach platforms. Hence there is a need for better understanding of the role that online social media can play in helping local Malaysian celebrities to build their own celebrity

personal branding without going through a “middle person” or without being limited by locality, time and cost (Arora & Predmore, 2013).

1.2 Problem Statement

Online Social media is the most powerful platform for relationship building and leveraging brands (Bartlett, 2010; Hackworth & Kunz, 2010; Monseau, 2009; Selina & Milz, 2009). However, majority academic studies focused on online social media as a new marketing tool (Berinato, 2010; Dong-Hun, 2010), which increases communication effectiveness (Dholakia & Durham, 2010; Hackworth & Kunz, 2010; Monseau, 2009; Selina & Milz, 2009). There is still a lack of studies focusing on the importance of personal branding on social media. Hence there is a lack of awareness towards the importance of celebrity personal branding on online social media (Dalpiaz, Rindova, & Ravasi, 2010) resulting in many celebrities just focusing on social media strategies which mainly aiming for virality, which is defined as the tendency of an image or post to be circulated widely online (Berger, 2013) without taking into consideration of their own celebrity personal branding on online social media.

On the other hand, there are theoretical gaps between personal brand strategies and social media strategies leading to much confusion in literatures. Personal branding is an emerging concept in the practice of marketing literature (Zarkada, 2012) in the offline world however the concept of personal branding was largely ignored in the field of academics (Klein, 2002) especially on online social media. Moreover, celebrities' personal branding had evolved with the advancement of online social media (Arruda,

2013), resulting in the inconsistency of celebrity personal branding in the literatures (Hughes, 2007; Laermer, 2011; Zarkada, 2012).

Furthermore, many literatures were focusing on business corporate or mass population (Shepherd, 2005), less were written about celebrity personal brands strategies on online social media. The biggest difference between firms' approach and celebrities' approach to build communities and facilitate social dialogue on online social media (Kietzmann, Hermkens, MacCarthy & Seilvestre, 2011) is that firms are looking for new customers, whereas celebrities are searching for fans' loyalty (Tam, 2014; Tomić, 2013). It is important to carry out studies in this scope of area as the power of celebrities on online social media are influential (Effron, 2013; Miller, 2014; Shaughnessy, 2013; Times, 2015) and celebrities are more skilful in engaging followers on online social media as compared to firms (Brown, 2013; Dou, Lim, Su, Zhou, & Cui, 2010).

Celebrity personal branding success on online social media does not occur overnight and it is a cumulative process that produces success with persistent and consistent execution (Beveridge, 2013; Glassman, 2012). Those with a defined personal brand strategy leads to brand success and army of followers on social media, while those without a defined strategy do not (Rothschild, 2011). Although celebrities are successful on social media in this current time frame (Pitt & Berthon, 2011; Zakaria, Watson & Edwards, 2010), the lack of practitioner's research and adequate strategy might lead to unsustainable success.

It was also being forecasted that there would be a significant increase in modern marketing strategies and a decrease in using traditional marketing efforts over the next

three years (Elite Email, 2013). However, the rate of growth and the importance of offline media varied in different countries. Therefore, it is relatively harder to determine which media is useful (Ames & Naaman, 2007; Howard & Jones, 2004). In other words, how far had online social media took over the offline traditional media in terms of celebrity personal branding?

One of the toughest obstacles that most celebrities encounter in the social media is the issue of managing activities across different countries and cultures. Celebrities personal brand strategies vary in each country (Patel, 2011) and are based closely with marketing home grown concept, hence celebrities from different countries demand a more home ground research (Rook, 2015). This is due to the differences in culture, geographical, religion, preferences and law jurisdiction (Patel, 2011; Wilson, Williams & Kemp, 2011). Many studies have been conducted to study the strategies adopted by international celebrities (Pietro & Pantano, 2012) however studies must be carried out to focus on local celebrities in each country to gain more practical insights (Schmidt & Cohen, 2013) and to provide more applicable strategies for the local celebrities.

As stated by Glassman (2012), it is not only important to study celebrity personal brand strategies applied by local celebrities, but also to understand the rationale and impact behind this trend (CNW, 2014). There is a need to analyse how much had social media impacted the celebrity's career overall.

This indicated that the importance of celebrity personal brand strategies on online social media is now being recognised and the need to study this scope of area in order to avoid any negative repercussions for celebrities. This is the basis for this research.

1.3 Research Questions (RQ)

The following eight basic questions were used to guide the purpose of this study.

- RQ1: Why do Malaysian celebrities utilise social media for their celebrity personal branding?
- RQ2: How far has online social media influenced the offline traditional media in terms of celebrity personal branding?
- RQ3: How has social media made an impact on celebrities' career?
- RQ4: What are the useful strategies adopted by Malaysian celebrities in building their personal branding on social media?
- RQ5: What are the current limitation or issues faced by these Malaysian celebrities?
- RQ6: How do Malaysian celebrities generate income from their social media?
- RQ7: In the view of the brand professionals, why is it important for Malaysian celebrities to manage their personal celebrity branding on social media?
- RQ8: How could the findings from the study be used to develop a suggested framework for celebrity's strategic utilisation of social media in managing their personal branding?

1.4 Research Objectives (RO)

Social media is a user content generated and organic platform(Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012) and as social media evolved into a more complex world, mere usage or just hitting the numbers of fans or likes on social media blindly by celebrities is insufficient. Blindly focusing on the numbers might seem like a “candy” for the short

run but in the long run might jeopardize the celebrity personal (Marwick, 2014). Hence this study's main objective is to explore celebrity personal brand strategies on online social media and to fill the gaps in the existing literatures. This study will also be guided by the eight basic research questions (**RQ**) in order to achieve research objectives (**RO**) as discussed in below.

- RO1: To understand the rationale behind local Malaysian celebrities utilising social media for their personal branding rather than just focusing in gaining the number of fans online.
- RO2: To study how far online social media has influenced offline traditional media in terms of celebrities' personal branding for local Malaysian celebrities.
- RO3: To evaluate how much social media has impacted Malaysian celebrities in their entertainment career.
- RO4: To explore some useful strategies adopted by Malaysian celebrities in building their celebrities' personal brands on social media.
- RO5: To discover current issues or limitations face by Malaysian celebrities on their social media.
- RO6: To understand how do Malaysian celebrities generate income from their personal branding built on social media.
- RO7: To determine the importance of Malaysian celebrities managing their celebrities' personal branding on social media from the view of the brand professionals.
- RO8: To develop a suggested framework for the strategic utilisation of social media in managingcelebrity personal branding.

In conclusion, this research aims to examine and focus on local Malaysian celebrity personal brand strategies on online social media in managing their personal branding online and the impact towards them.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This thesis aims to contribute to the body of knowledge for all practitioners and provides more insight by filling in the existing gaps and providing updated data and information in relation towards celebrity personal brand strategies on online social media.

On the other hand, this thesis will analyse how far had online social media influenced the offline traditional media in terms of celebrity personal branding at this current time frame. This is to identify the growing importance online social media in terms of celebrity personal branding.

This study will also explore the relationship among celebrity personal brand strategies on social media, virality online, celebrity branding online and celebrity popularity online in order to clarify the confusions among all these terms.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to provide some useful home-grounded celebrity personal brand strategies, which is more applicable for Malaysian celebrities. Current issues and limitation faced by celebrities on online social media will be discovered in order to provide more precaution and awareness for other celebrities.

In conclusion, this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge of celebrity personal brand strategies on online social media while providing a route map and benchmarks for other local celebrities in Malaysia in managing their celebrity personal branding on online social media.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

There are some limitations in this thesis. Due to the limited updated literature resources within the literatures of Malaysian entertainment scene, literature from other countries were used for guidance purposes.

The subjects of study are 10 selected local Malaysian celebrities in various genres and fields, they are selected simply because they represent certain criteria of this research as opposed to the average real world situation. This low sample of study might not be generalised towards the mass population.

Lastly, the suggested conceptual framework only proposed a partial view of the reality and it could be susceptible to the researcher bias. Results generated for this topic might change over time due to the rapid growth of online social media.

1.7 Linkage of Research Questions (RQ) to Research Objectives (RO)

The linkage of Research Questions (RQ) to Research Objectives (RO) is being illustrated in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1: Linkage of RQ to RO

RQ	RO
RQ1: Why do Malaysian celebrities utilize social media for their celebrity personal branding?	RO1: To understand the rationale behind local Malaysian celebrities utilising social media for their personal branding rather than just focusing in gaining the number of fans online.
RQ2: How far has online social media influenced the offline traditional media in terms of celebrity personal branding?	RO2: To study how far online social media has influenced offline traditional media in terms of celebrities' personal branding for local Malaysian celebrities.
RQ3: How has social media made an impact on the celebrities' careers?	RO3: To evaluate how much social media has made an impact on Malaysian celebrities in their entertainment career.
RQ4: What are the useful strategies adopted by the Malaysian celebrities in building their personal branding on social media?	RO4: To explore some useful strategies adopted by Malaysian celebrities themselves in building their celebrities' personal brands on social media.
RQ5: What are the current limitation or issues faced by these Malaysian celebrities?	RO5: To discover current issues or limitation face by Malaysian celebrities on their social media.

RQ6: How do Malaysian celebrities generate income from their social media?	RO6: To understand how Malaysian celebrities generate income from their personal branding built on social media.
RQ7: In the view of the brand professionals, why is it important for Malaysian celebrities to manage their personal celebrity branding on social media?	RO7: To determine the importance of Malaysian celebrities in managing their celebrities' personal branding on social media from the view of the brand professionals.
RQ8: How could the findings from the study be used to develop a suggested framework for celebrity's strategic utilization of social media in managing their personal branding?	RO8: To develop a suggested framework for the strategic utilisation of social media in managing celebrity personal branding.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Celebrities

The term of celebrities is usually applied to a person or a group of people, which the status is often due to fame and public attention or recognition in the media. The ways of becoming celebrities vary in a wide range of methods, from their professions, wealth or following appearance in the media (Muda, Musa & Putit, 2012).

1.8.2 Followers

Online social media users who have subscribed to a particular online social media account where news and updates will be showed in their online social media notification stream (Felix & Hinsch, 2016).

1.8.3 Offline Traditional Media

The media in the actual world, which include any mass outlets such as newspaper, radio and television. This is a traditional way of advertising or marketing (Stephen *et al*, 2012).

1.8.4 Popularity

Popularity means how many people know a certain thing or a person. It is the state of quality of being noticed, especially the state of being widely appreciated, accepted or sought after (Berger & Fişek, 2006). The popularity of a person can be measured on online social media is indicated by the number of followers(Monty, 2013).

1.8.5 Virality

The tendency of an image, video, or piece of information being circulated widely from one Internet use to another (Sampson, 2012).

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